

## AMERICAN PLUM *Prunus americana* Marsh.

Plant Symbol = PRAM

Contributed by: USDA NRCS Plant Materials  
Program



J.S. Peterson  
USDA NRCS NPDC  
@ PLANTS

### Uses

**Windbreaks:** Plant American plum in the central or outside rows where adequate water is available. It may also be planted in single-row windbreaks.

**Wildlife:** American plum is highly important as wildlife cover and food. The thorny, suckering growth, when protected, forms a thicket valuable for bird nesting, loafing, and roosting, and animal loafing and bedding. Twigs and foliage provide a highly preferred browse for whitetail and mule deer.

**Recreation and Beautification:** The thorny growth and suckering characteristics should be considered before planting this species near a recreation area. It can be used for screening and natural barriers. The fruit is used widely for making jams and jellies.

**Ethnobotanic:** American plum was and still is used as a source of food and medicine by Native Americans in the Midwest and West.

### Status

Please consult the PLANTS Web site and your State Department of Natural Resources for this plant's

current status (e.g. threatened or endangered species, state noxious status, and wetland indicator values).

### Description

*Prunus americana* Marsh., American plum, is a deciduous large shrub or small tree with a broad crown, reaching heights up to 15 feet. Fruits are red to yellow, almost globular edible plums about 1 inch in diameter. Flowers are white, 5-petaled, about 1 inch across, and borne singly or in clusters at the juncture of a stem and leaf. Leaves are alternate, broadly oval in shape with a sharply tapering tip, and sharply, often doubly toothed edges; they are generally 2 to 4 inches long on slender stalks, dark green above, pale and smooth below. The plant's numerous stems are grayish and become scaly with age; its branches are more or less spiny with sharp-tipped twigs. The roots of American plum are shallow, widely spreading, and readily sprouting.

### Adaptation and Distribution

Widely distributed over the eastern two thirds of central North America, American plum grows in prairies, woodlands, pastures, and along roadsides and riverbanks. The shrub is winter-hardy, but intolerant of shade and drought; it requires the equivalent of 22 to 25 inches of precipitation.

For a current distribution map, please consult the Plant Profile page for this species on the PLANTS Web site.

### Establishment

American plum can be planted from seed and is relatively easy to transplant. Plant in well-drained soil.

### Management

Plantings in dry areas must have supplemental water or available ground moisture. Traditional resource managers used burning as a management tool, which eliminated plant competition and provided nutrient enrichment for increased fruit production; branch pruning was also used to increase production.

### Pests and Potential Problems

There are no known serious insect problems; plum pocket and black knot are common diseases, but are generally not serious.

**Cultivars, Improved, and Selected Materials (and area of origin)**

There are many different cultivars of *Prunus* species that have been developed for ornamental flowers and edible fruit.

**Prepared By & Species Coordinator:**  
*USDA NRCS Plant Materials Program*

Edited: 05Feb2002 JLK; 060809 jsp

For more information about this and other plants, please contact your local NRCS field office or Conservation District, and visit the PLANTS Web site <<http://plants.usda.gov>> or the Plant Materials Program Web site <<http://Plant-Materials.nrcs.usda.gov>>

*The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, and marital or family status. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at 202-720-2600 (voice and TDD).*

*To file a complaint of discrimination write USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, Room 326-W, Whitten Building, 14th and Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410 or call 202-720-5964 (voice or TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.*

*Read about Civil Rights at the Natural Resources Conservation Service.*